## The Honor of the Big Snows

By JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD. Author of "The Danger Trail"

> Coppright, '911, by the Bobbs Merrill Co.

> > CHAPTER IL Little Melisse.

HEY carried Cummins' wife where a clearing had been cut in the edge of the forest, and at the foot of a giant spruce, lowering sentinel-like to the sky, they lowered her into the frozen earth, Gaspingly Williams, the old factor, stumbled over the words on a ragged age that had been torn from a Bible. The rough men who stood about him bowed their wild beads poon their breasts, and sobs broke from them. At last Williams stopped his reading

and cried chokingly:

As the earth fell there came from the edge of the forest the low, sweet music Jan Thoreau's violin. No man in all the world could have told what he Thoreau's tongue was as voluble as his yed, for it was the music of Jan's wild and whispering of the winds, ened by some strange inheritance which he carried in his throbbing

the little cable where the woman

There was something new in the cabe boy stood beside John Cummins ispered, his great eyes g, "It ees the leetle white an-

in the little Melisse," replied the

le dropped upon his knees with his face close to the new life that was take the place of the one that had ne out. Jan felt something tug to in a strange way at his heart, and too, fell upon his knees beside John mains in this first worship of the

From this hour of their first kneeli we been hard for man to break.

That night when Jan picked up his in to go back to Mukee's cabin ins put his two hands on the boulders and said:

Jan, who are you and where die ou come from? ian stretched his arm vaguely to the

Jan Thorenu," he replied simply nees in my violon. We come alon b the beer snow. We starve

ven day in the beer snow. My violon the wolf off at night." ook again, Jap. Didn't you come

om there or there or there?" Cumming turned slowly, facing first the east and Hudson's bay, then to e south, and lastly to the west. There as comething more than curiosity in teuse face that came back in star-

diry to Jan Thorean. nched his shoulders, and "It see not lie that Jan Thoreau and

es violon come through the beeg w," he replied softly. "It ees not There is plenty of room here now."

ald Cummins huskily. "Will you stay ith the little Melisse and me?" "With the leetle Melissel" gasped the boy. "I-I-stay with the leetle white

No man learned more of Jan than had Cummins. Even to Mukee his history was equally simple and short. Alwars he said that he came from out of her tiny white face peered out at him, he north, which meant the Barren ds, and the Barren lands meant ath. No man had ever come across m as Jan had come, and at another time and under other circumstances mins and his people would have believed him mad.

But they knew that Jan Thoreau had come like a messenger from the angels, that the woman's soul had gone out to meet him, and that she had died sweetly on John Cummins' breast while he played. So the boy, with his thin, sene face and his great beautiful eres, became a part of what the woin had left behind for them to love. in a way he made up for her loss. The woman had brought something new and sweet into their barren lives, and he brought something new and sweet-the music of his violin. He played for them to the evening in the factor's office, and at these times they knew that Cummins' wife was very near to them and that she was speaking to them through the things which

Jan Thoreau played. There were hours of triumph for Jan in the factor's office, but it was the andieuce in the little cabin that Jan liked best, and, most of all, he loved to have the little Melisse alone. As the days of early spring trapping approached and the wilderness for a hunmed miles around the post was crissed with the trails of the Cree and wayan fur seekers, Cummin

that would be coming to market about eight weeks later.

This was a year of intense rivairy. for the French competitors of the company had established a post 200 miles to the west, and rumor spread that they were to give sixty pounds of flour to the company's forty and four feet of cloth to the yard. This meant action among Williams and his people, and the factor himself, his son and all his men plunged into the wilderness.

The exodus left desolate lifelessness at the post.

in the silence and lifelessness Jan Thorean felt a new and ever increas ing happiness. To him the sound of life was a thing vibrant with barsh uess; quiet-the dead, pulseiess quiet of lifelessness-was beautiful. He dreamed in it, and it was then that his fingers discovered new things in his

He often sent Maballa, the Indian woman who cared for Melisse, to gossip with Williams' Chippewayan wife. so that he was alone a great deal with the baby. At these times, when the door was safely barred against the ontside world, it was a different Jan Thoreau who crouched upon his knees beside the cot. His face was aflame with a great absorbing passion which at other times be concealed.

"Ab, ze sweet leetle white angel!" stretched his long arms above his head be would cry as she tugged and kicked. "I luf you so-I luf you an' will "The great God keep Mees Cum- stay always an' play ze violon! Ah. you will be ze gr-r-reat bea-utiful white angel lak-her!"

He would laugh and coo like a mother and talk, for at these times Jan violin. His voice grew soft and low. and his eyes shone with a soft mist as he told ber those things which John it had come to him with the pic- Cummins would have given much to

John Cummins stood over the lone whispered, bringing his eyes so near that she reached up an inquiring finger to them. "Then you shall understand why it happened, sweet Melisse," be whispered, bringing his eyes so near that she reached up an inquiring finger to them.

Once, when Melisse straightened herself for an instant and half reached now-a tiny white, breathing thing up her tiny arms to him, laughing and cooing into his face, he gave a glad cry, crushed his face down to bers and fore-kissed her. There was something about it that frightened the little Meisse, and she set up a wailing that nt Jan in a panic of dismay for Maintured to kiss her again.

It was during this fortnight of desoition at the post that Jan after a short ce one day discovered the big coblem for himself and John Cum-

loon her knees in front of their abin he saw Maballa, industriously ling the half naked little Melisse out in a soft pile of snow and doing ber work, as she firmly believed, in a nost faithful and thorough manner. With a shrick, Jan threw off his pack and darted toward her like a wild

"Sacre blen-you keel-keel ze leetle delisse!" be cried shrilly, snatching up the half frozen child. "Mon Dieu, she ees not papoose; she ees ceevilize-ceerilize!" and he ran swiftly with her into the cabin, flinging back a torrent of Cree auathema at the dumbly be dered Maballa.

At last Mahalla went into an ecstasy of understanding. Melisse was not to be taken out and rolled in the snow; so she brought in the snow and rolled it over Melisse.

When Jan discovered this his tongue twisted itself into sounds so terrible and his face writhed so fiercely that Maballa began to comprehend that thereafter no snow at all, either out doors or in, was to be used in the physical development of the little Melisse

This was the beginning of the prob-

iem, and it grew and burst, forth in

all its significance on the day before Cummins came in from the wilderness. For a week Maballa bad been dropping sty hints of a wonderful thing which she and the factor's half breed wife were making for the baby. Un the day before Cummins' arrival Jan came in from chopping wood. Melisse was smiling and making queer, friendly little signals to him from the table. She was standing upright, wedged in

and Jan knew that this was Maballa's surprise. Melisse was in a papoose "Melisse, I say you shall be no papoose!" he cried, running to the table. "You ees ceevilize! You shall be no

a coffin shaped thing from which only

come tak Jan Thoreau!" And he snatched her from her prison, flung Maballa's bandiwork out into the snow and waited impatiently for the return of John Curamins.

papoose, not if twen' t'ous'nd devil

Cummius returned the next day, not that his work among the wild trappers to the south was finished, but befrom a slippery ledge. When Jan. from his wood chopping in the edge of the forest, saw the team race up to the little cabin and a strange Cree ball carry the wounded man through the door, he sped swiftly across the open with visions of new misfortune before

But the injury was not serious and Jan lost no time in revealing his fears after Maballa had been sent to the fartor's wife. With graphic gesture be told of what had happened Cummins hobbled to the door to took mon the wallow in the snow and hobbled back to the table when Jan ran there in excited imitation of the way in which he had found the little Melisse in Ma balla's sting

"She ees ceevilize!" finished Jan bot

and Cummins felt a thickening in his papoose out of Melisse. She growpoose"-

"Yes, she must be like her, Jan-just as good and just as sweet and just as beautiful," interrupted Cummins gen-

There was a quick intaking of his breath as he hobbled back to his own cot, leaving Jan at play with the baby. That night, in the dim, sputtering glow of an oil lamp John Cummins and Jan Thoreau solemnly set to work to thrash out the great problem that had suddenly entered into their existence. To these two there was no element of humor in what they were doing, for into their keeping had been given a thing for which God bad not schemed

So far as Cummins knew, there was not a white woman nearer than Fort Churchill, 200 miles away. In all that region he knew of only two full white men, and they were Williams and himself. The baby Melisse was bopelessly lost in a world of savagery-honest, loval big souled savagery-but savagery for all that, and the thought of it brought the shadows of fear and foreboding to the two into whose lives the problem had just come.

Long into the night they talked seriously of the matter, while Melisse slept; and the longer they talked the greater loomed the problem before them. Cummins fencied that he already began to see signs of the transformation in Melisse. She was passionately fond of the gaudy things Maballa gave ber, which was a sign of savagery. She was charmed by confinement in the papoose sling, which was another sign of it, and she had not died in the snow wallows, which was still another.

So far back as he could remember, Cummins had never come into finger touch of a white baby. Jan was as blissfully ignorant. So they determined upon immediate and strepuous action. Maballa would be ceaselessly watched and checked at every turn. The Indian children would not be allowed to come near Melisse. They two -John Cummins and Jan Thoreauwould make her like the woman who

"She ees ceevilize," said Jan with finality, "an' we mus' keep her ceevilize."

Commins counted back gravely apon balla. It was a long time before he | bis fingers. The little Melisse was four months and eighteen days old.

"Tomorrow we will make her one of those things with wheels, like the ba by wagous they have in the south." be said. "She must not go, in the pa "An' 1 will teach her to mu

whispered Jan. his eyes glowing "That ees ceevilize." Suddenly an enger light came into Cummins' face, and he went to a call

corner of the room. "Here are the books-her books. Jan," he said softly, the trembling thrill of inspiration in his voice. He drew the books out, one by one, his



"She loved this, Jan," he said huskily. fingers trembling and his breath com ing quickly as he touched them, a dozen worn, dusty things. At the last for a long time. It was a little Bible.

"She loved this, Jan." he said huski Now the change was at hand. It more than anything else, and tittle awakening wilderness. The must be a Christian "

te great God," said Jan softly

baby. when they come in. She shall be bup tized."

Like a cat Jan was on his feet, his eyes flashing, his long, thin fingers elinched, his body quivering with a terrible excitement.

"No, no! Not haptize by missioner!"

he cried. "She shall be good an love ze great God, but not haptize by mis stoner' No no no"

Cummins turned upon him in aston

strengthening the company's friend- ty, "She ees not papoose! She mus' ishment. Before him Jan Thoreau snips and pargaining for the catch be lak-ber!" His great eyes shone, stood for a minute like one gone mad, his whole being consumed in a pasthroat as he looked into them and saw | sion terrible to look upon. Lithe giant what the boy meant. "Mabalia mak of muscle and fearlessness that he was, Cummins involuntarily drew back know noting lak papoose, talk lak pa- a step, and the mainspring of instinct within him prompted him to lift a from his breast,

Jan noted the backward step, the guarded uplift of hand, and with an agaized cry be buried his face in his bands. In another instant be had turned and, before Commins' startled voice found words, had opened the door and run out into the night. The man saw him darting swiftly toward the forest and called to him, but there was no response.

Painting itself each instant more plainly through the tumult of his emotions was what Jan had come to know as the picture in his brain. Shadowy and indistinct at first, in pale, elusive lines of mental fabric, he saw the picture growing, and in its growth be saw first the soft, sweet outlines of a woman's face and then great luring eyes, dark like his own. And before these eyes, which gazed upon him with overwhelming love, all else faded away from before Jan Thoreau. The fire went out of his eyes, his fingers relaxed, and after a little while be got up out of the snow, shivering, and

went back to the cabin. Cummins asked no questions. He looked at Jan from his cot and watched the boy silently as be undressed and went to bed, and in the morning the whole incident passed from his

> CHAPTER III. The Caribou Carnival.

HE education of the little- M lisse began at once, while the post was still deserted. It begun, first of all, with Maballa. She stared dumbly and with shattered faith at these two creatures who told her of wonderful things in the upbring of a child-things of which she had never so much as heard rumor before. Her mother instincts were aroused, but with Cree stoicism she made po betraval of them.

The leather tanned immobility teething. She sat grimly and watched them in silence when between them they tried vainly to persuade Melisse to use her feet.

Weeks passed and Williams came i from the southern forests. Mukee followed him from the edge of the Barrens. Old Per-ee, partly Eskimo, returned from the Eskimo people, threequarters starved and with balf of his dogs stolen. From the north, east. west and south the post's fur rangers | with the loys of the moment, a weld trailed back. Lafe was resumed. There was a softness in the air, a growing warmth in the midday sun. co covered box standing upon end in a The days of the big change were near. And when they came, John Cummins | skies There were no bickerings amone and Jan Thoreau, of all the factor's the hunters. people, wore patches at their knees. One afternoon in the beginning of the mush snow a long team of rakish as they were for the company The malemutes, driven by an Athabasca clearing about the post. The entire post rushed out to meet the newcomer. He was Jean de Gravois, the most important man in the Fond du Lac country, for whose goodwill the company paid a small bonus. That he had made a record catch even the children knew by the size of the packs on his sledge

and by the swagger in his walk. to appear at the amoual gathering of the wilderness fur gatherers. He was a big man in reputation as he was small in stature. He was one of the few of his kind who had developed personal vanity along with onerring cunning in the ways of the wild. Ev erybody liked Gravois, for he had big soul in him and was as fearless as a lynx, and he liked everybody, includ-

ing himself. He explained his early arrival by at nouncing in a nonchalant manner that after he had given his malemutes day's rest he was going on to Fort Churchill to bring back a wife. He hinted with a punctuating crack of his whip that he would make a second visit and a more interesting one at just about the time when the trappers were there in force. Jan Thoreau listened to him, bunch

ing his shoulders a little at the other's manifest air of importance. In turn the French Canadian scrutinized Jan

good naturedly. Every hour after the half breed's arrival quickened the pulse of expectancy at the post, For six months it had one of all, which was more ragged been a small and solitary unit of life and worn than the others, he gazed in the heart of a hig desofation. The first snow had smothered it in a lone his wife's Bible, finger worn, patched liness that was almost the loneliness pathetic in its poverty. The man gulp of desertion. With that first snow be gan the harvest days of the trappers.

ly. "She loved this worn, old book was like the breath of spring to the Melisse must love it also. Melisse people were moving. Trap lines were being broken, shacks abandoned. "Ah, yes; ze leetle Melisse mus' love sledge dogs put to harness. On the day that Jean de Gravois left for Cummins rose to his feet and stood Hudson bay the company's supplies for a moment looking at the sleeping came in from Fort Churchill-seven toboggans drawn by Eskimo dogs. "A missionary is coming over from laden with flour and cloth, tifty pounds Fort Churchill to talk to our trappers of beads, ammunition and a hundred other things, to be exchanged for the furs that would soon be in London

> and Paris. Fearfully Jan Thoreau ran out to meet the sledges. There were seven Indians and one white man. Jan thrust himself close to look at the white man. He wore two revolver holsters and carried an automatic. Unquestionably be was not a missionary, but an agent of the company, well

prepared to care for the company's treasure.

Jan burried back to the cabin, his heart bubbling with a strange joy.

"There ees no missioner, Melisse!" be cried triumphantly, dropping beside ber, his face glowing with the gladness of his tidings. "You shall be hand as if to ward off a leaping thing good and beautiful, lak her, but you shall not be baptize by missioner! has not come!"

A few minutes later Cummins came in. One of his hands was torn and bleeding.

"Those Eskimo dogs are demons!" he growled. "If they knew bow to stand on their legs they'd eat our huskles alive. Will you belp me with Jan was at work in an instant ban-

daging the wounded hand. "It ees not deep," he said, and then, without looking up, he added, "The missioner did not come."

"No." said Cummins shortly. "Nelher has the mall. He is with that." He did not notice the sudden tremble of Jan's tingers, nor did he see the startled look that shot into the boy's down turned eyes. Jan finished his bandaging without betraying his emotion and went back with Cummins to the company's store.

The next morning two Chippewayans trailed in with a team of mongrel curs from the south. Thereafter Cummini found but little time to devote to Melisse. The snow was softening rapidly, and the daily increasing warmth of the sun hastened the movement of the trappers. Mukee's people from the western Barren lands arrived first, bringing with them great loads of musk ox and caribon skins and an army of big footed, long legged Mackenzle bounds that pulled like horses and walled-like whipped pupples when the buskles and Eskimo dogs set upon

From east and west and south all trails now led to the post. By the end of the third day after the arrival of the company's supplies a babel of fighting, yelling, ceaselessly moving discord had driven forth the peace and dled. The fighting and discord were among the dogs, and the yelling was a necessary human accompaniment. Half a hundred packs, almost as wild and her face underwent no whit of change | as savage as the wolves from whom when Cummins solemnly declared that | half of them possessed a strong inherithe little Melisse was about to begin | tance of blood, were thrown suddenly into warring confusion.

There was no cessation in the battle upon a bearskin stretched on the door of the faffex. Half a dozen buttles were fought to the death each day and night. Those that died were chief by the south bred curs-mixtures of mastiff, Great Dane and sheep dogsand the fatally slow Mackenzie hounds

Yet beyond all this discord and bloody strife there was a great, throb bing burnso happiness-a beating of honest hearts filled to overflowing ing of new friendships, a renewal of old ones, a closer union of the brotherhood that holds together all things under the cold gray of the northern

These were days of unprecedented prosperity and triumph for the baby cabin was half filled with strange French-Canadian raced wildly into the things, for all went to look upon the little Melisse and gave something to ber. There were polar bears' teeth. brought down by the little black men who in turn had got them from the coast people; strange gods carved from wood, bits of fur, bushy fostalls, lynx paws, dried fruits, candy bought at fabulous prices in the store and musk -always and incessantly musk-from Gravois was usually one of the last | Mukee's people of the West Barrens. Jan had not played upon his violin since the coming of Jean, de Gravois,

but one evening he tuned his strings and said to Melisse: "They have been good to you, my Melisse. I will give them ze museck

of ze violon." It was the big night at the post-the night that is known from Athabasca to Hudson bay as the night of the caribou roast. A week bad passed, and there were no more furs to be dispose of. In the company's ledger each man had received his credit, and in the company's store the furs were piled high and safe. Three caribou had been killed by Per-ee and his hunters, and on this night, when Jap took down his violin from its peg on the wall, a huge fire blazed in the open, and on spits six inches in diameter the caribou were roasting.

The air was filled with the sound and odor of the carnival. Above the fighting and snarling of dogs the forest people lifted their voices in wild celebration forgetting in this one holiday of the year the silence that they would carry back into the solitudes with them. Shrill voices rose in meaningless cries above the roaring of the fire. Caribon whips snapped flercely. Chippewayans, Crees, Eskimos and breeds crowded in the red glare. The factor's men shouted and sang like mad, for this was the company's annual "good time"-the show that would lure many end of another trapping season.

Huge boxes of white bread were placed pear to the fire. A tub of real butter, brought 5,000 miles from across the sea for the occasion, was set on a gun case thrown where the heat played upon it in yellow glory. In a giant copner kettle, over a smaller fire, bubbled and steamed half a barrel of coffee.

The richness of the odors that drifted in the air set the dogs gathering upon their naunches beyond the waiting circle of masters, their lips dripping, their fangs snapping in an eagerness that was not for the flesh of battie. And above it all there gleamed down a billion stars from out of the skies and the aurora flung its banners through the pale night.

Seated upon the edge of one of the

bread poxes, Jan began to play. It was not the low, sweet music of Cummins and the little Melisse that he played now, but a wild, wailing song that he had found in the autumn winds. It burst above the crackling fire and the tumuit of man and dog in a weird and savage beauty that hushed all sound, and life about him became like life struck suddenly dead. After a while his violin sang a lower song, and sweeter; and still softer it became, and more sweet, until be was playing that which be loved most of all-the music that had filled the little cabin when Cummins' wife died.

'As he continued to play there came an interruption to the silence-a low refrain that was almost like that of the moaning wind. It grew beyond the tense circle of men, until a song of infinite sadness rose from the throats of a hundred dogs in response to Jan Thoreau's violin.

Cummins saw the surrounding cor don become thinner as man crushed closer to man, and he saw strained faces turned from the player to where the dogs sat full throated upon their haunches, with their heads pointed straight to the stars in the sky.

"For the love of beaven, play n more of that!" he cried in the boy's ear. "Play something fast."

Jan lifted his head as if from dream. In an instant he perceived the strange effect of his music, and his bow raced across the strings of his violin in a rhythm swift and buoyant his voice rising shrill and clear in words familiar to them all:

"Oh, se cariboo-oo-oo, se cariboo-i He roas" on high, Jes' under se sky. Ze beeg white cariboo-oo-ool

Oh, se cariboo-oo-oo, se cariboo He brown an' julo' an' sweeti Ze cariboe-co-co he ver' pol He ross' on high, Jes' under se sky,

He ready now to come an' eat!" With yells that rose above the last words of the song Mukee and his Crees tugged at their poles, and the roasted caribou fell upon the snow. Jan drew back and, with his violin bugged anquiet in which Cummins' wife had der one arm, watched the wild reveler as, with bared knives flashing in the light, they crowded to the feast Williams, the factor, joined him.

"Looks like a fight doesn't it Jan? Once I saw a fight at a caribon roast." "So did I," said Jan, who had not taken his eyes from the jostling crowd. continued Williams, "beyond the Great

"Far beyond," said Jan, lifting his eyes quietly. "It was ver near to me Great Bear. For who you fight at se Great Bear?" The factor was silent, and the mus-

cles of his arms grew like steel as he saw the madness in Jan's face. Suddenly be reached out and gripped the boy's wrists. Jan made no effort to evade the clutch "For who you fight?" he cried again

"For who you fight at se Great Bear?" "We tried to kill a map, but he got away," said Williams, speaking so joy that only Jan beard, "He was"- The factor stopped. "Ze missioner!" panted Jan.

softer glow which came into theu sened at once the factor's grip on the boy's wrists,

"Yes, the missioner." Jan drew back. He evaded meetls the eyes of Cummins as he made his way among the men. There was new burst of song as Mukee and hi Orees pulled down a second earlbon but the boy paid no attention to the fresh excitement. He thrust his knife into its sheath and ran-ran swiftly through the packs of dogs fighting and snarling over the scraps that had been thrown to them, past Maballa, who was watching the savage bandu around the big fire, and into the little cabin to Melisse.

Here he flung himself upon his knees and for the first time he caught the baby in his arms, holding her close to him and rocking her to and fro as he cried out sobbingly the words which she did not understand.

"An' when I fin' beem an' kill beem I will come back to you, my angel Melisse," be whispered. "And then you will luf Jan Thoreau for letting out the blood of a missioner!"

He put her back into the little bed. kissed her again and turned to the

For a few moments Jan stood with his back to Melisse and his eyes upon the carnival about a great fire. As he looked the third caribou was pulled down from its spit, and the multitude of dogs rushed in upon the abandoned carcasses of the other two.

He caught his breath quickly as loud shout and the walling yelp of a hurt dog rose for an instant above all other sounds. Only one thing was wanting to complete another picture in his brain-a scene which had burned itself into his life forever and which he strove to fight back as he stood staring from the doorway. He half expected it to come-the shrill scream or a povish voice, an instant's quiet, then the low throated thunder of Investigations, and furnishes Repor impending vengeance—and the fight.

With marvelous quickness his excit ed mind reconstructed the scene before him into the scene that had been. He heard the scream again, which had been his voice, saw as if in a dream or systematizing office work. All the frenzied rush of men and the flash | business confidential of knives, and then from where he lay. trampled and bleeding in the snow, the long, lean team of swift buskies that had carried in mad flight the one

whose life those knives sought. Williams had been there; he had seen the fight-his knife had flashed with the others in its demand for life. And yet he-Jan Thoreau-had not been recognized by the factor out there

beside the caribon roast! He hurried toward the fire. Haif-



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Way across the open he stopped group out of the forest opposite Cummins' cabin there trailed slowly a team of dogs. In the shadows of the spruce, hidden from the revelers, the team halted. Jan beard the low voices of men, and a figure detached itself from the gloom, walking slowly and in the manner of one near to exhaustion in the direction of the carnival.